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Stage

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STAGE

By

YING XU

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

May 7, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Stage is three minutes 2D/3D experimental animation. The whole story is about the growth of a person who is pursuing her dream. The story starts with a dancer practicing and learning the skills. As her skill and ability increases, her desires and needs expand. She begins to recognize, perceive and introspect everything around her deeply. After lost, confusion, self-doubt, finally, she accepts how the world is and decide not to live against her truth.

I want to use experimental animation as a way of describing how people feel when they experience their lives. This concept is based initially on my personal experience which I believe lots of people share. When we love something, we go deep into that realm. Finally, the things we learn from that realm affects the way we understand ourselves and the world. This film is like my personal statement, and it is dedicated to all the people who, like me, worked as hard as they can when they pursue their dreams.

The media I used for this film contains both 3D and 2D techniques. 3D gives me the maximum freedom to test out the lighting and framing of each shot. 2D allows me to provide the film with a variable hand-painting style. My goal was to tell the story using whatever skills I had supporting my concept meanwhile creating an aesthetic visual experience for the audience.

INTRODUCTION

This film is more than just a thesis production that presents the theoretical knowledge and technical skills that I have learned during my MFA program. It is a summary of my growth over the past few years as an artist. It covers not only the improvement of my abilities but also the psychological journey I have experienced during my studies. It contains four stages describing the change of a dancer.

Comparing *Stage* to a general narrative story is more like a poem or a song that emphasized on expressing emotion and thoughts. Since it is not a traditional story, the process of making the film is very complicated and challenging. Because there is not enough driving force from the abstract story, the film is more dependent on composition, character movements, and music to depict the emotions and concepts behind it.

My goal for the film is to use what I have learned over the past years to describe how my feelings and thoughts changed during my growth through different stages of my life. Hopefully this, resonates with the audience.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Stage Inspiration

This idea has been around me for several years. My personal life experience inspired me, and this concept developed with me according to my understanding of humanity, the real world and myself as time goes.

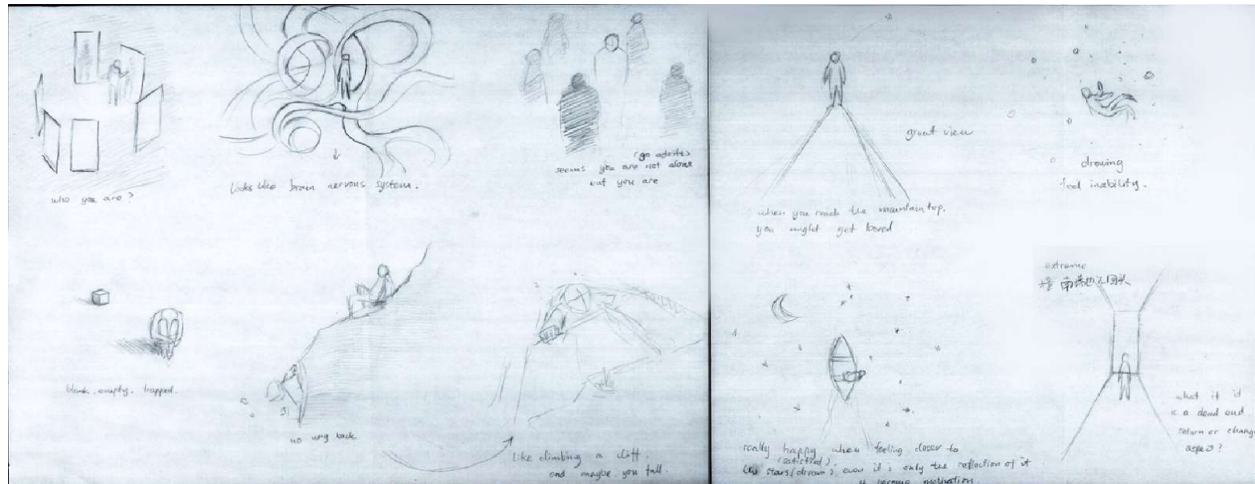
I love digital art, but my enthusiasm was not respected or supported by my family until I found a professional job position as a 3D artist in an animation studio in Beijing after college. I gradually got into the animation and film industry. After working for a while, my thirst for more knowledge of entertainment art and film creation could not be fulfilled by working as a technical artist. That was when I decide to quit the job and go back to school.

I have always believed that people can achieve what they are fighting for if they work hard and persist on their goal. The hardest part has always been persistence. Every person has different needs during different phases of his life such as love, wealth, power, etc. We are greedy, we want all of those, but the truth is that we must sacrifice something to get the other. The society seems to have a standard for what is right. Desire affects our choice as well as the pressure from the society. Any decision no matter how small it is may change our entire life. Therefore, it makes life harder for people to insist on what they like from the beginning to the end.

I had times when nobody understands what I am doing and mocked me, and times that people who were important to me persuaded me to give up what I was doing. After all these years I am glad that I am still following my heart and do what I like. And this was the reason why I was so obsessed with my ideas and wanted to express them to everyone so badly.

Story Development

In the beginning, I tried to fit this concept idea into a narrative story, so that I can utilize my 3D skills to make it a professional 3D film which can also be used as the demo reel of my 3D techniques afterward for job applications. But no matter how I tried, the script I wrote felt lack of gags or humor that a traditional animation short should have. Maybe it was because the theme I had was too emotionally detailed and elegant, not suitable for witty and sarcastic styles, or perhaps because I didn't have the talent to turn this serious concept into a funny story. I failed to create a satisfying script for the concept I wanted to express. After talking to Cathleen Ashworth, she suggested me to break up my concepts into pieces. After I told her the images in my mind, she showed interests and encouraged me to extend the idea and try to find the connection underneath afterward. My concept of the story was gradually taken shape after combining all the fragments. That was when I figured that my story might be more suitable for an experimental film style. To further develop my ideas, I found Charles Bandla to be my thesis advisor. Charles advised me to sketch out what I had in mind, using image to describe them more visually and detailly.



Rough sketches 4/2016

At that time, my ideas were still fragmented and scattered, and the only inner connection was that all of them are some philosophies of life that I experienced in my life. It contained my understanding of loneliness, my interpretation of the relationship between people, and the depiction of self-doubts, etc. I decided to screen out some of the concepts that I feel most representative, then to strengthen them. According to the timeline and causative relation between the ideas, I compiled and organized them together into a draft story:

A person who loves dancing started to learn and practice dancing skills.

The fundamental practices are critical, but also repetitive, tedious and very time-consuming. Over time, the girl refined her skills, and she became a professional who can dance solo under the spotlight. Repeating the same performance every day, she felt something is missing, and she wanted more. The spotlight was like a cage that imprisoned her. She sought changes, but at the same time, she feared that the changes would make her lose everything she

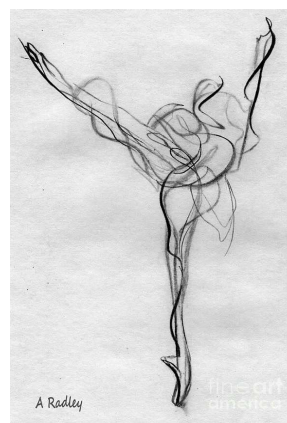
had. She was confused and lost, that is when she noticed that there were lots of people in the world who were just like her, they were like her shadows, wearing the same dress, performing the same dance, everything was alike. But they were not her, every person was isolated in their space seeking for their own answers, and there was no way to communicate. Some people regard the family as the most important, some devote to their career, some yearn for freedom, and some worship material life. Wondering what she wanted, she hesitated and concerned about her future. She tried hard to dance her way out of her chaotic thoughts, but the more she sought the answer, the more she was misled by the voices around her. Invisible pressure filled her life until she was buried in the negative emotion. Resistance, exhaustion, weakness, emptiness, isolated from the outside world, she finally cleaned up her mind and felt her heart and body. She relaxed and stretched her body, recalled her happy memory while he was dancing. Suddenly she realized being authentic to herself and being happy is her core. All the worries and negative emotions were not pushing her forward but dragging her back. Instead of overthinking everything to find an answer, she should continue to do what she loves and try to enjoy her life through good and bad experiences. Life itself is not about the destination but the journey, time flies by no matter how we spend the day, so we should embrace our life more with an optimistic attitude.

In this story, the main character is a dancer. The main reason was that dancing movements are expressive, and accompany with music, the film could bring out more beautiful and aesthetic feeling for the audiences which was very important to an

experimental piece. When the film didn't have a straightforward plot, the appealing visual movements played a critical role in attracting audience's attention. With this setting, I was hoping all the audience can at least enjoy watching it as a poem. The abstract concept had evolved and changed during the preparation even production period so that I had encountered some difficulties during the thesis proposal meeting and the production meetings. Since the idea appear to be abstract and incomplete all the time, my advisors could not imagine how the film was going to be like. Teachers were worried about whether I could finish it on time. However, they chose to trust me because I had shown my passion and commitment to this film. I want to say thank you to everyone and my advisor Charles for their understanding and support.

Concept Design

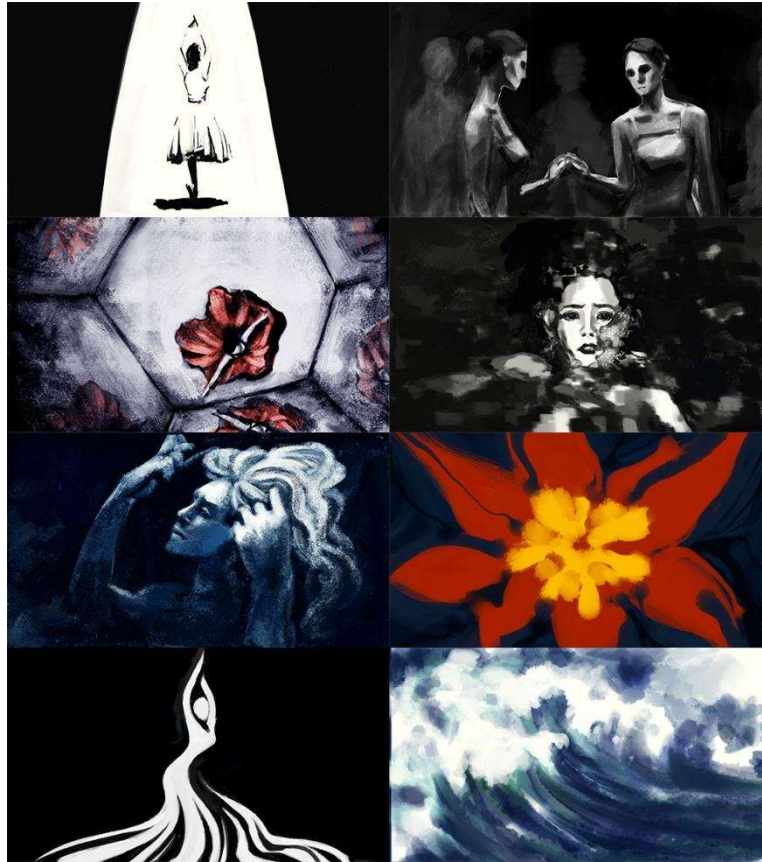
My concept designs for this piece was slightly abstract according to my story. I had very colorful and artistic visions for it. I was seeking for a loose traditional painting/drawing style which people could see the lines and brush-strokes of the image. Unfortunately, I did not have a full set of painting skills and enough time to execute my artistic visions. However, it was enjoyable to work on these abstract ideas. I set no boundaries for my concept, and I tried lots of different styles for it too. Below were some references I found for my designs.





Reference pictures

Besides some drawing references, I had a lot of photographs and video clips of the dance performances too. It is obvious to tell that most of the references I found especially photos have a clear background and foolproof compositing so that people's visual center can be directed to the dancer himself. In addition, to better express his motion, the images have a very high contrast with light and shadow which light up the outline of the dancer's body shape. The beautiful human body formation combined with graceful movements can quickly seize the attention of audiences. And this was the art style I want for my film. Here were some concepts I drew.



Draft Concepts

As you can tell, I learnt from the reference and used simple colors and strong composting for most of the designs. Clear shapes facilitated the recognition and transformation of the animated movements, and simple colors were more conducive to the expression of visual emotions.

The visual style I was pursuing was technically very tough to achieve in 3D software. After discussing this with my advisor, I decided to use my 3D skills to create all the animation of the character 's dance movements. I could also take advantage of

the framing and layout tools in 3D to edit the composition of the film. After that, paint on the top of my 3D footage to give it the hand-paint style I wanted.

This progress of production increased my workload to a large extent comparing to the traditional 2D/3D productions. I had to do all the 3D animation first and render them out, then used that footage to do another 2D animation afterward. Due to the time-consuming process of this film, I could only use black and white for the colors and simplified some complex design as well. These were some screenshots below that had been simplified, the content of each layouts was corresponding to the original concept arts.



Layouts

As for the design of the character, I did not really give her any "design." I remembered MJ asked me about the look of the character for the film during the proposal meeting, and my answer never changed from there. This was a film referring to all the people with the same feelings and confusion, including myself. So, my purpose was not to give any characteristics to our protagonist. The reason I made the character a female was that women have a more elegant and graceful look, and their curvy body outlines are more suitable for this film. Besides, I could add a skirt for her costume, and that could make the animation more flexible and lively with lots of secondary motions from the skirt. Anyway, the main idea was that the settings of the character should be vague rather than specific.

Storyboard & Animatic

According to my concept, I designed a draft storyboard. Although this film was conceptual and experimental, the storyboard was still essential before film production. My storyboard played a role as a reference rather than a footage to work on for keyframe animation. The storyline stays the same even though I kept adding and canceling ideas for the film during the production.

The story had four stages; the first stage revealed the life of a person as a dance beginner. Her life was filled up with learning and practicing. After she became professional on the stage, she felt there was something missing for her life. The public opinion swayed her thoughts while she was seeking for the meaning of her life. She

wanted to break out of that situation. In the third stage, she blocked out all external factors and voices that confused her and tried to listen to her inner voice; Her desires and self-doubt did not seem to ease her suffering. At last, she finally let go of her chaotic pessimistic thoughts. Life was staying true to oneself and follow her nature she thought. With that usual mind for life, she went back to practice as she used to.

It was hard to make the storyboard at first. In my mind, the animation would contain a lot of metamorphoses and metaphors that refer to thoughts and feelings that I wanted to share in the film. My mind changed from day to day which made me changed my storyboard all the time. Charles encouraged me to use a more organic way to produce the film instead of following the traditional animation process. So, to avoid spending too much time on the pre-production, I directly went into animating before I had the perfect storyboard.

I designed several continuous long shots that might need 3D camera's assistance to revolved around the character to observe the character from different perspectives. I choreographed a whole set of dance movements according to the storyline for the character after watching tons of reference videos on the YouTube. Without an established storyboard, animatic became hard to do as well. I did the blocking for 3D animation first, then utilized my sketches and some of my 3D layouts to finalize the animatic. From my point of view, the animatic mainly provided a rough guide for the timing of the film, and it also played an essential role in reporting progress of my film to my committee members. However, the timing I planned in the animatic was so imprecise that it could not be given to my composer to use. Moreover, the animatic was

even more abstract, without my explanation people could barely understand the content of the film. I believe animatic has always been a problem to people who are doing experimental animations since we have the image in our mind, but it is too troubling demonstrating it to other people before the actual film comes out.

Overall, my pre-production was not that tough, I didn't spend too much time on it, and I was happy with the result I have got. Thanks a lot, to Charles who always believed in me and gave me a lot of support and valuable advice.

Music

As for music preparation, I had no any experience as a dancer or composer, but this film heavily relied on the music. I hesitated at first about whether to find a composer to work with at the beginning. But Charles and I reached a consensus that inserting the music might disturb the rhythm I planned for the film. So not until I finished my 3D animation did I find my composer. But I still needed some rhythm, a beat I could follow to design the dance for the character. Thus, I tried some app on the phone, downloaded some BPM (Beat Per Minute) video to mimic the rhythm that I needed. According to my composer Marc Laroussini, that BPM was helpful.

I knew Marc and trusted his ability. We had cooperated before for another student short film called *You Made Me Love You*. So, after my animatic was done, I brought all of the materials I had to Marc and explained my concepts to him. He was very excited for this type of animation, so he accepted to score the film. We contacted frequently, and we went to observe the dance classes together. He even recorded some

ambient sounds from the Brockport Dance Studio. I didn't have any idea of how the music was going to be like. So, he found some reference music for me to listen. I would send him the latest film footage once a week, so he can have accurate timing for the music. I think we made a great team working on this film.

PRODUCTION

First, I want to explain more about why I chose this 3D/2D as my media. I noticed that a lot of filmmakers are somehow obsessed with the media they are using. Their doubts of the way of using 3D as a reference seems like a way of cheating in 2D. I respect people with different opinions, but I need to speak out for many people who use this technique. No matter what kind of skills or tools we use for the film, it was all about serving the story and concept. I am not a craftsman to show how superb my skills are but a story teller to tell my story the way I want. Using 3D techniques to support 2D film has been used for a really long time. The earliest film I know was the famous Disney movie called Beauty and Beast 1991. Their whole dance scene background is 3D with a virtual camera revolving around the characters.

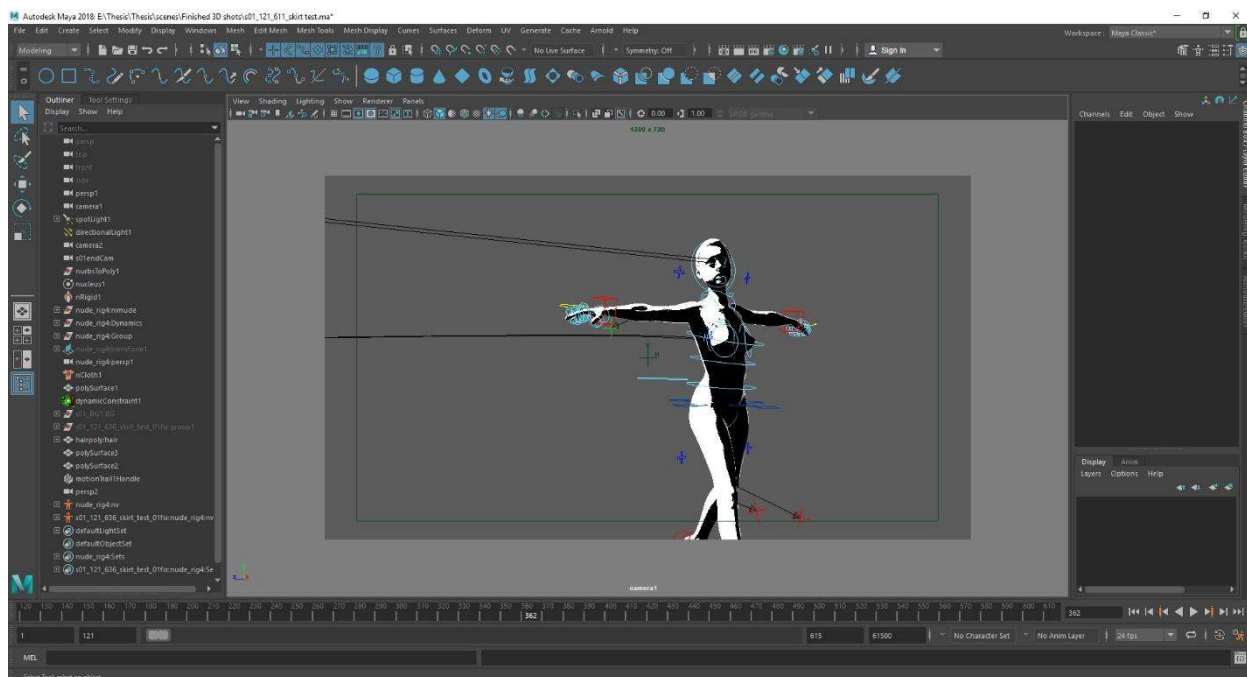


Beauty and Beast 1991

There were also people asking why do not directly use a real-life video footage to do the rotoscope. I can only say that I want the full control of the image. All the procedures I had gone through was not as simple as just roto-paint. I would highly encourage students to learn more about experimental animation. It is very innovative and creative spirit to jump out of the traditional ways of making animation. People can make progress only by breaking the rules not following them.

3D Assets Set-up

I used an average female nude model I had in my personal library as my main character. I added a regular skirt and hair to the character. I didn't plan to paint the texture for the model because I would repaint the animation in Photoshop afterward. But I applied a Toon Shader for the character. This shader was good for observing the outline and how light affects the form, and that made the next repaint step easier.



Maya Workspace Screenshot

I had a regular full-body human rig set for the character. The only difficult part was the skirt rigging. I didn't use joint/skeleton rig for the skirt. I used NCloth simulation system in Autodesk Maya. What this technique does is that it can let the geometry simulating what a real cloth does. Once the cloth was created, I could use some constraint method to attach the skirt to the waist of the character, so the skirt would follow the character's action. Then I adjusted the field force for the virtual space and set the body of the character as a passive collider, so that the body can be recognized by the NCloth skirt. Therefore, when the 3D character was dancing, the skirt hem would follow her actions and react to body collision and gave us a realistic cloth animation by calculating. In this way, the character could have a natural hemline effect, and it increased the beauty and details of the pictures.

3D Animation

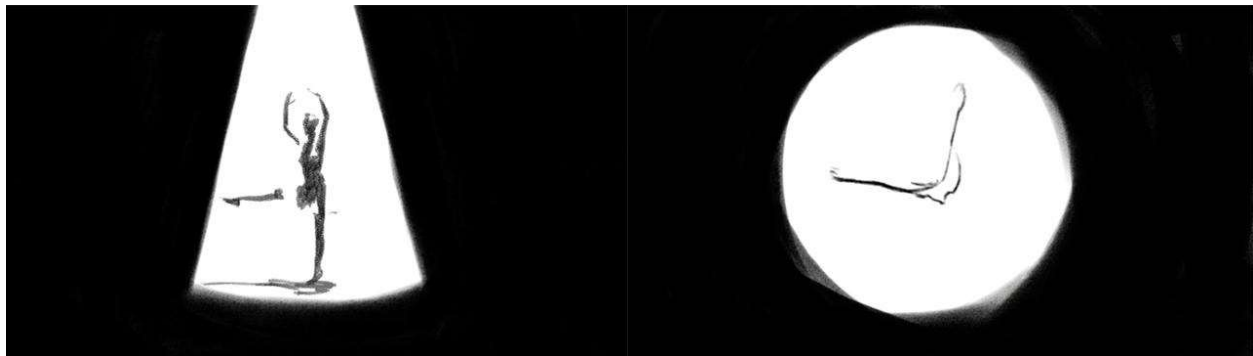
This part might be the most time consuming and challenging part of the whole film creation. The choreography was difficult for someone who rarely even watch the dance performance. Honestly speaking, I did not have the confidence to say that I knew about dance. But I thought there was one thing in common for all of us, which was that we express ourselves through our work. As the creator of this film, I was very concerned about what I put into the pictures. There were suggestions about finding a choreographer for the film, telling him what I need for my film and record the dancing footage from him. I thought this was a good suggestion because it can save me a lot of

time for sure. But, explain my concept to someone and let that person create the dance for the film, that means handling the control of my film to someone else. That was not my plan, especially for such a personal film. So, to choreograph the animation, I watched lots of dance performance videos online, thanks to a friend of mine, I got the chance to observe two dance classes in Brockport Dance Studio. At last, I incorporated the movements that suit the story together and composed the final dance for the character. At this point, the design of the animation was basically in shape.

The dance movement and the content of the story must correspond to each other. I had been careful with the details of the character's action. The pace of the dance changed from slow to fast indicated her skills matured. The spinning dance action referred to repetitive and boring exercise. The falling action was choreographed in her dance, to avoid the misconception that the character made a mistake on the stage. For the inner world section, I animated her without the limitation of gravity to simulate an environment like the sea of thoughts. These were some inspiration I got from observing one of the class when the teacher encouraged the dancers to stretch and bend their bodies to feel how their bodies change. I thought this was a perfect example of the understanding of ourselves. At last the dance movements became wild and more expressive, which indicated that the character breakthrough the barrier and formality and her mind was set free. All the actions for this section evolved from animal movements, which represents the concept of following the nature.

After I designed the animation, there was the step of layout and blocking out the rough animation. The 3D layout was just like a 3D storyboard, but with more options for

the camera settings. Since I had continuous dance movements, it was very tricky planning out the entering and leaving the scene. With the freedom of the virtual 3D camera, I could try different camera perspectives and lighting sets to achieve the visual compositing I wanted for the film. Take this shot as an example:



Eye-level

Top-view

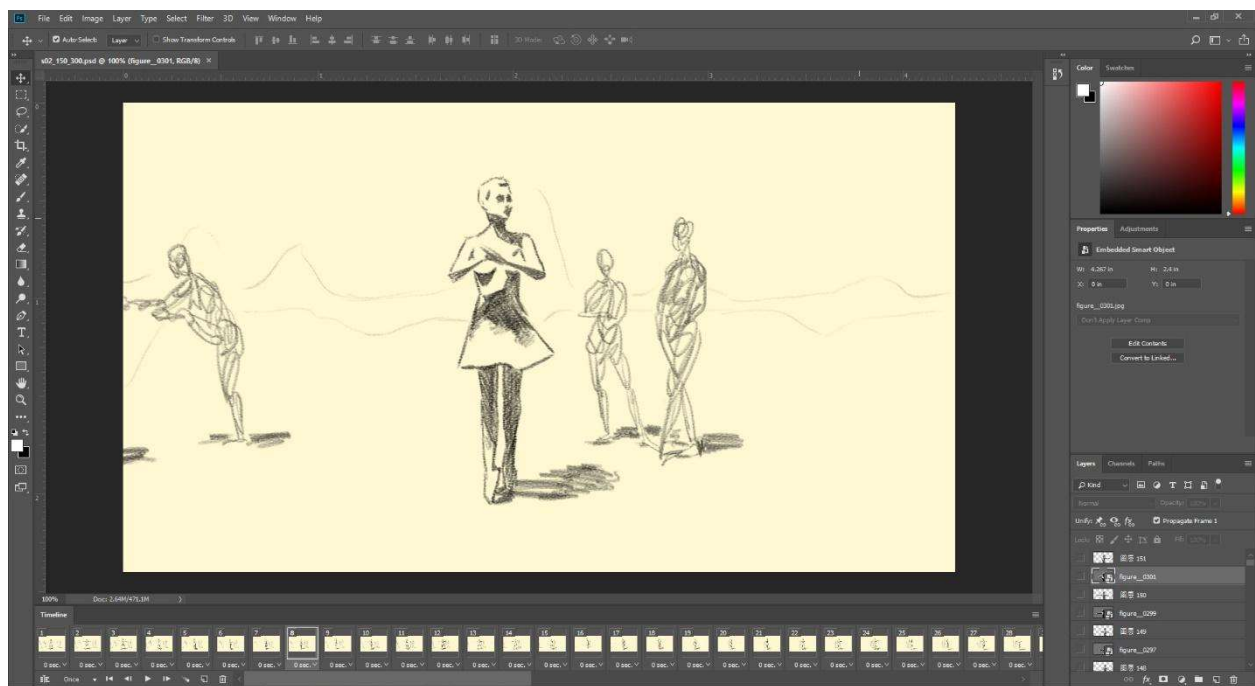
It was a regular eye-level shot at first (left) so we could observe her dance more clearly, but seeing from the top view, the circle shape of the spotlight adding the spinning character in the middle looked like a ticking clock (right) which became a perfect metaphor for time passing by.

After blocking out the keyframes, the pacing of the animation was determined. The next step was splining and refine the animation. For me, this part was the renovation of the entire animation to ensure that the pictures provide balanced and aesthetic feeling for the audience. I paid attention to the arch of the movement, and I added some secondary animation to bring more visual interests and vividness to the pictures. These are basic principles of animation, so I won't go into explaining these.

After I finished the 3D animation, I did a rough render. I had all the animation rendered out as JPGS, so I could directly put them into Photoshop to repaint them.

2D Animation

I finished drawing all my 2D animation in Adobe Photoshop using its Timeline tool. Nearly 3/5 of the animation had the 3D rendered footage with the correct timing that I could directly re-paint on. The other 2/5 contained too much metamorphosis which was hard to simulate with 3D software, so I used Adobe After Effects to adjust the timing while doing the animation. By the time I started painting, I got the rough music template from my composer, so I could adjust the overall film according to the music.



Adobe Photoshop Timeline Workspace

The rotoscope process here was not just replicating what was already in the 3D Render result. My goal for this step was to use different hand-painted styles to show

how the character's mental state changed. I once made a 3D watercolor short film, and the only regret that I had was that I didn't break the formality of the plants, so I didn't get the most out of the beautiful natural morphological changes that the watercolor ink I recorded. So, this time I tried not to adhere to form rigidly. By that, I meant the shape of the character, the settings of the background, anything that was in the frame did not have to remain intact. Anything can be changed according to the context of the story. I mentioned background here because it played a very important role in this film. It represented the real world and the character's inner world. And the core of the whole story was depicting the conflicts between the character and the world around her. So, the background was like another main character in this story.

Next, I will explain my thoughts about the art styles I used along with the storyline. At the first section, the start of dancing was like the start of drawing. Everything was like a pencil sketch. The background was a regular practice studio with silhouettes of other dancers. Later, pencil lines of the background got distorted because practices sometimes could be tedious and distracting. As practice went, the character focused more on her skills ignoring what was happening around her. The messy background lines disappeared, and the art style of the character changed to firm and clear charcoal shades.



This transformation meant she stood out from the crowd becoming a professional dancer. The background then changed into a spotlight to indicate that she was performing on the stage. I used pure black and white for the background here, so the spotlight also looked like a cage trapped the dancer inside. It was a sign that the dancer hit the bottleneck of her career. When we looked from above, she was spinning round and round inside of that light circle like a clock. While Time slipped, the light cage shrank. All the pressure from the outside world overwhelmed her, and she fell on that stage. Here I changed the view to first person perspective to show the change of the environment. She covered that light with her hand. The light went through her fingers. The black and white strips were like a fence in front of her, it also looked like the windows of a fast passing train.



The morph of the background took the character into her inner world. There was nothing in that world, suddenly a pair of eyes opened. I was trying to give the audiences a feeling of being watched by the surroundings. It also meant the character began to see the world with her heart. Then the background changed into mirrors that surround the character. This part of the story emphasized that everyone is unique. Although many people seem to be the same, they can't relate to each other or help each other.

Since this scene had a lot of human figures, I separated the character from the background using two different brushes. The main character in the front had firm shape, and the grey reflections in the back were vague. All the reflections represented people who shared the same feelings with her, and each figure was isolated in their own space. Here I revolved the camera around the character, to show there was no way for her to escape.



Her dance movements became more powerful because she wanted to break out of that situation, but she couldn't change the world. Finally, after being oppressed to a certain point, she faced her cognitive collapse. When the outside world was broken, the inner world revealed. The spreading pessimistic darkness in between the fragments of outside world engulfed the body of the character.



The environment in this stage was set to be a sea of thoughts. The weightlessness feeling was shown by the motion of the character. With a pitch-black background, the variation of the pictures transferred to the body of the character which

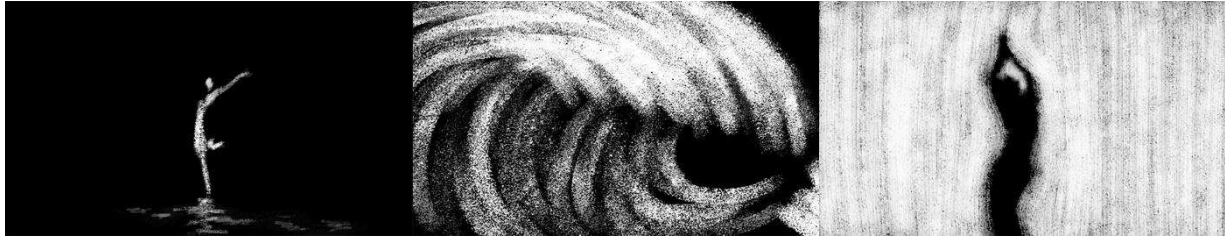
meant she started to introspect herself. The character's shape now became the canvas. I utilized the different grey to separate the content. The outline of the character was still dancing and feeling herself, but the images contained inside revealed how her thoughts scattered and reorganized. Finally, a path formed in her thoughts, and it seemed that she found the answer to her question. This force brought light back to her inner world, and it guided the way for her.



The character was no longer lost and frustrated for her life. She swam towards the light. I higher up the contrast of the image and drew out the reflection for the surface, so we could have a feeling that she was approaching to the surface. But instead of breaking out the water surface, I reversed the camera view to let her standing upside down. I wanted to show people that, when you are stressed out, you need to think reversely. The conflict that had been plaguing the character was finally resolved and dissipated. As soon as her feet touched the water surface, the background merged with the character.

The last part contains a lot of elements from nature and lot of metamorphosis. It was the most abstract part of the whole film. I used a bold brush to give the picture a rough, vivid visual style, to release the anguish feeling of the past. The character transformed back and forth into different natural creatures while dancing. The idea I was

trying to express here was that life, regardless of its form or length, is the answer. Those who can live following their hearts are the luckiest lives in the world.



At the end of the film, when the character returned to the same life with an enlightened attitude. The art style changed back to what it was in the dance studio. After all, enjoy the happiness and bitterness of every day was the best result that I could think of the end of this film.

POST-PRODUCTION

Compositing

I used Adobe After Effects for compositing. This was just a simple step by compiling all the individual frames I exported from Photoshop and reorganized them in After Effects. There was some shot includes separate layers for backgrounds and character, but overall the process was simple and straightforward. This was a good time for me to check the overall looking of the whole film, and to debug frames that were not working. Organization for compositing files are critical. I created separated Comp in Adobe After Effects for every shot, so that I didn't have trouble going through every file folder to seek for individual frame that was not working. When the final music came into place, I got to check the synchronization of the film. Maybe because I had been going back and forth checking my 2D animation during production, there were no critical problems for me to fix. At last, I overlaid a paper texture to the whole film to give it a paper feel.

SCREENING AUDIENCE REACTION

Stage was screened on May 14th, 2017 at the Carlson auditorium in Rochester Institute of Technology. People were quiet during the film even after I presented my artist statement. I did not know how they feel which made me very nervous. I explained the way I did the film but didn't mention too much of the concept of the film because that part was supposed to be comprehended by the audience.

After a short silence, I got some positive feedback from the audiences at the screening, mostly about how beautiful the dance animation was, about the impressive composition I designed for the mirror scene, or about the expressive sandy art style I chose. I am glad to hear that they enjoyed this film, but no body commented about the content of the story made me a little bit sad. I got to talk to Stephanie and Charles during the break, Stephanie joked about everyone was stunned after seeing the film that was why there was not too many comments. I appreciated her approval and encouragement.

After screening I did show this film to several people because I really want to know exactly how people feel after seeing the film. There were two reviews really surprised me. One came from one of my best friends, she said she saw me in that film. I guess she knows me too well that is why she can feel all the feelings I put into that film. Another came from an art professor in China who was visiting America. I showed him my film by chance, and he interpreted the film deeply. I love this film myself. And I want

to thank my advisor and my composer for their effort and support. Although not everyone can understand it, but they do enjoy it. And that is enough for me.

CONCLUSION

This film was not only a thesis film that represents all the things I learned through these years but also a personal statement of mine. It expresses a complete concept through a short time with beautiful animation. The success for me is that I have fulfilled my promise to animate this film to be like a poem or a song, and it can evoke your emotional resonance while you watch it. The only regrets for me was not having enough time to put color into the film. It reduced the variability of the image when there was only black and white.

I have to say that I felt enjoyable during the full process of making this film. I hope I can remember the status I had for this film and use it for other artistic creation in the future.

APPENDIX I: THESIS PROPOSAL

Journey

(Working Title)

Ying Xu

3D Experimental Animation

MFA Thesis Proposal

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

March 2016

Approved for Submission by:

Charles Bandla, Thesis Chair

Log line:

A man is on a journey searching for something (goal/dream). The man's mental and emotional states are visualized as he travels toward his goals.

Treatment/Story:

Journey is a four-minute experimental animation, created in 3D. There will be a main human character who is searching for something. The film will depict his inner world as he tries to experience his life. This journey will also show both his emotional inner life and his real-world constraints through abstract metaphors.

Below are examples of several possible scenes:

The film starts with the main character, trapped in a box, in an empty white/blank space. He wakes up and feels uncomfortable. He opens the box, tries to leave but he has no direction. When he gets far away, he looks back, and the box is the only thing that he can see in this endless white empty space. So, he returns to where the box is for several times. He cannot leave, because he does not know how. Finally, he sees a (shooting star) black dot flying across the sky, and slowly he works his way towards the dot.

The meaning of this scene is that everyone has a "safe comfortable zone". It is very hard to leave that zone, and if they do not have a specific goal to motivate them to leave, they get stuck. We all need a dream and a gentle push and enough courage to get started on the "Journey".

The main character is wandering in the frame, it is gray and foggy. He has a sense that there are other people in the fog because he sees gray shapes in the fog. They are all walking in the same direction. He is walking in the same direction as all the shapes, he tries to communicate to the gray shapes, but it seems those shapes do not understand him, no one reacts to him. Eventually the gray shapes are less and less, as some turn off into different directions. Seeing people around him leaving, He tries to go with some of them, but before he catches up with them, those shapes disappears. Soon he finds himself alone in the fog.

The meaning of this scene is that when you go on a journey, it seems that you go in the same direction as everyone else, but every person is really on the journey by themselves. Everyone has their own path, and people cannot really feel what you feel.

The main character enters a space with a lot of mirrors facing him, but the reflection of him is always distorted, some of them is frosted, some of them is colored and behind every mirror there is a path. He walks around all the mirrors and sees himself in the mirrors, trying to find one reflection which looks more like him. Then he finds one that has a vague shape of him, as he gets closer the reflection seems to be clearer. So, the man finally chooses the path behind.

The meaning of this scene is that people get lost when they are trying to figure out who they are and what they want. Also, people and the world see the person

differently, and when other people evaluate you, it will affect you in some way too. Hopefully you remember what drove you to your journey.

The man is still on his journey. The road is all twisted and overlap with each other like a maze or neural system, the man gets confused, he can feel where he wants to reach but there is no direct straight way for him. As he goes the road has become harder and harder. After a while he is climbing a cliff and he struggles with each step, he wants to turn back and give up. But he has no way to go back, he can only go up. Maybe he will fall and be severely injured, or he reaches a dead end and had to return to where he was to start over. It is really a setback for the character, but finally he changes his way of thinking, and find a way to continue his journey.

The meaning behind is that, there is no short cut in life, and failure is a common thing for people, but it forces you to become brave and mature.

The man is in a boat in a lake, the surface of the lake is so peaceful that it is reflecting the stars and moon in the sky. The man feels happy about being closer to the dreaming stars and the moon. He plays with the reflections in the lake. Suddenly he sank into the water, he is trying so hard waving and kicking, and he just can't rise to the surface, he can't breathe, and he felt helpless. He got choked but he stays alive after struggling.

The meaning to this thing is that, people will be happy to see themselves getting closer to their dream, but through the way to your destination, there are times when you

feel you can't make it no matter how hard you tried. It might even kill your dream when you felt helpless.

He finally gets to the top and he sees a great view at the mountain top. He was excited about that first, but after he stays there for a while, he felt bored, even though there is a great view, the view is not changing anymore. He thinks about leaving and hesitates whether he should leave or not. Eventually he leaves the mountain top and starts another journey.

The meaning to this scene is that once you arrive at where you thought you were going, you find out that "journey" itself is the true meaning of life, thus he left the mountain top and a new journey begins.

Rationale:

The concept of this idea has been around me for several years. It is how I feel about my life when I am chasing my goals/dream. I feel anxious, lost, self-doubt, happy, hope, helpless and regret. I rethink about my life and choices that I made, and still trying to figure out who I am and what I want. And I know that people share these feelings as long as they are on their own "Journey" to somewhere, so what I want to achieve for this piece is to show all these feelings through visual and animation.

In terms of techniques, because 3D animation is not as free as 2D animation, I can't use morph for the objects or the backgrounds, so I need to figure out ways to translate my character from scene to scene. It is not only an experimental piece for the

concept, but also a challenge for me to use my skills to make more abstract images in a 3D space.

Visuals:

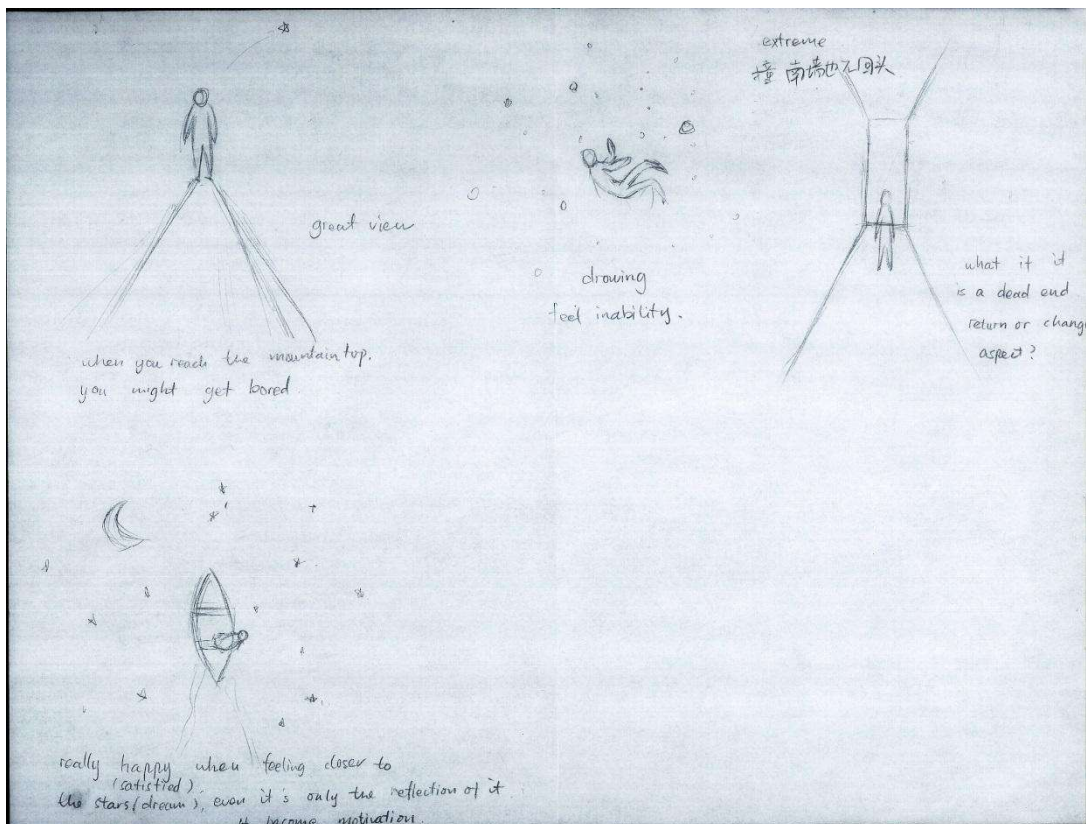
The visual style of this film is kind of graphic with stylized shape and color. Since it is not a narrative story, the style might change during different stages of the journey.

The main character's design will not be changed during his journey, but other characters in the film will be shapes. And the background is going to be transform a lot. I had some reference pictures for the styles I might want to use in my film:





I also did some thumbnails of the film:



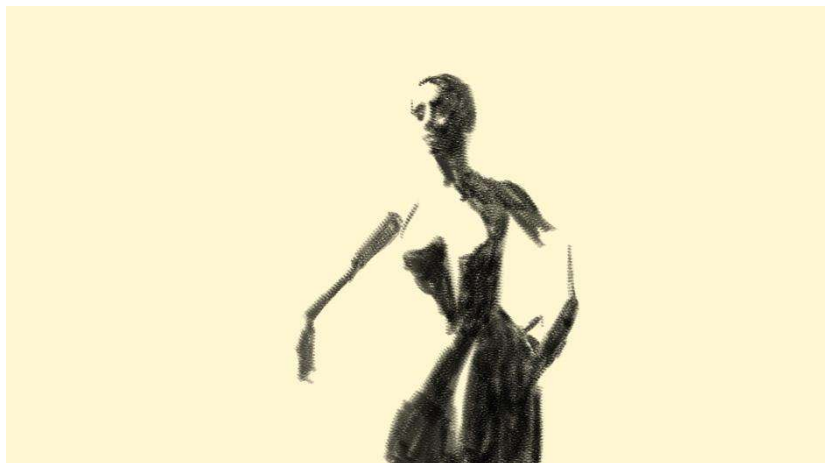
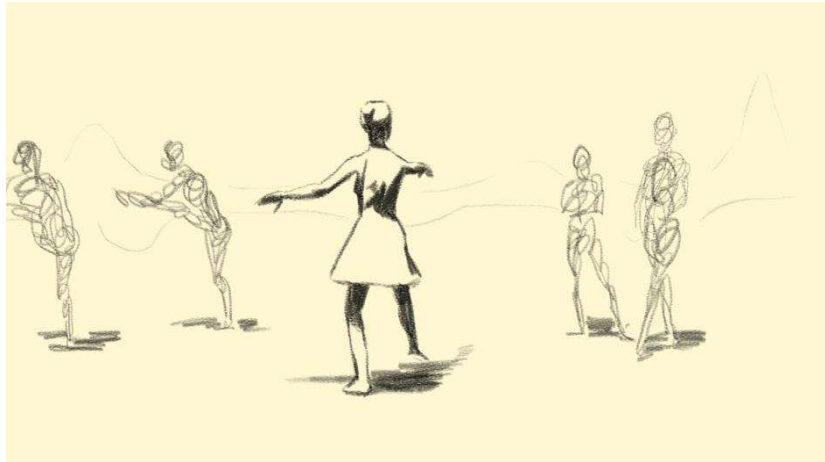
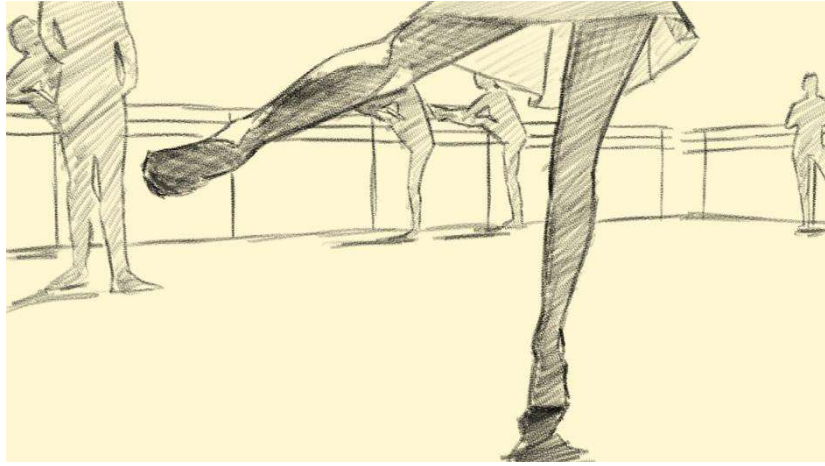
Budget for "Journey"

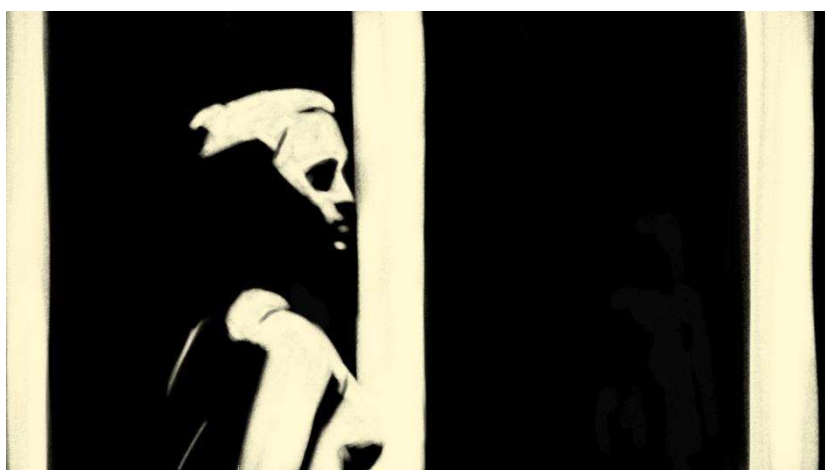
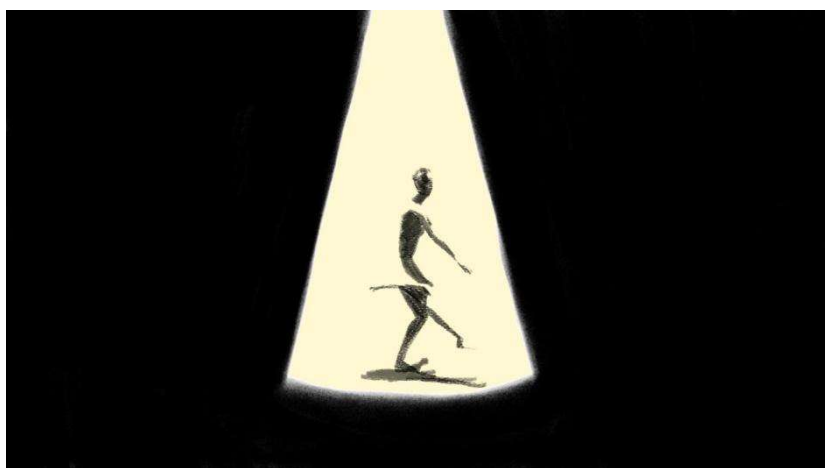
	Cost	In Kind	Actual
Pre Production			
Art supplies	200	No	200
Photoshop	300	Yes	0
Production			
Wacom Tablet	400	Yes	0
Computer	2000	Yes	0
Maya	3500	Yes	0
Google Drive	0	Yes	0
External Drive	60	No	60
Music	500	No	500
Post Production			
Render Farm	300	Yes	0
Pro-Tool	700	Yes	0
Sound FX	100	No	100
Sound Mix	100	No	100
Nuke	500	Yes	
Blueray Disc	50	No	50
Festival Fees	200	No	200
Total			1210

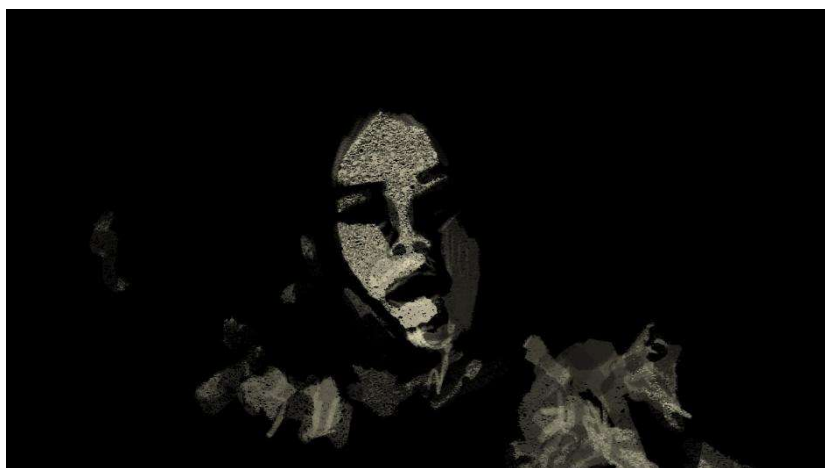
Timeline for "Journey"

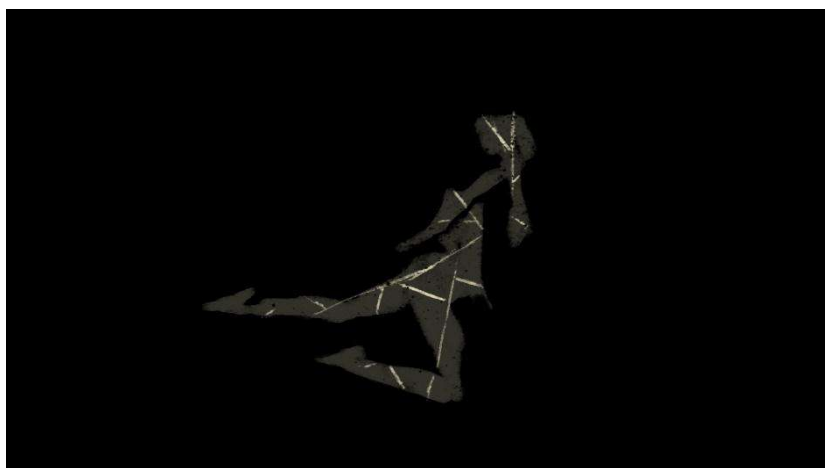
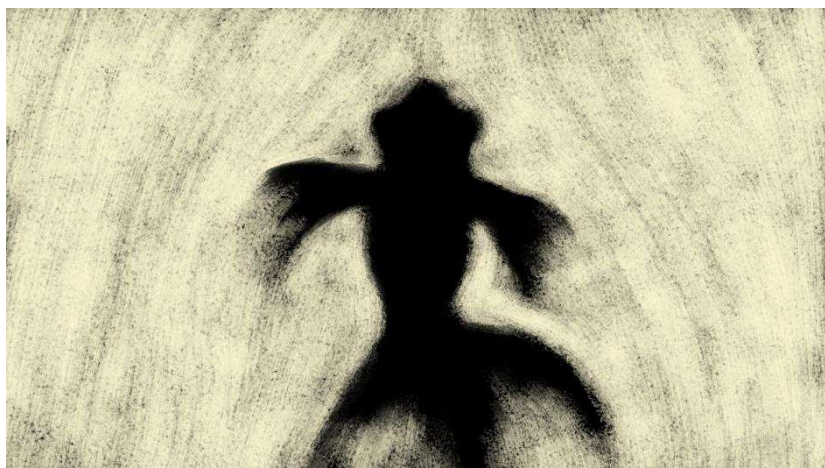
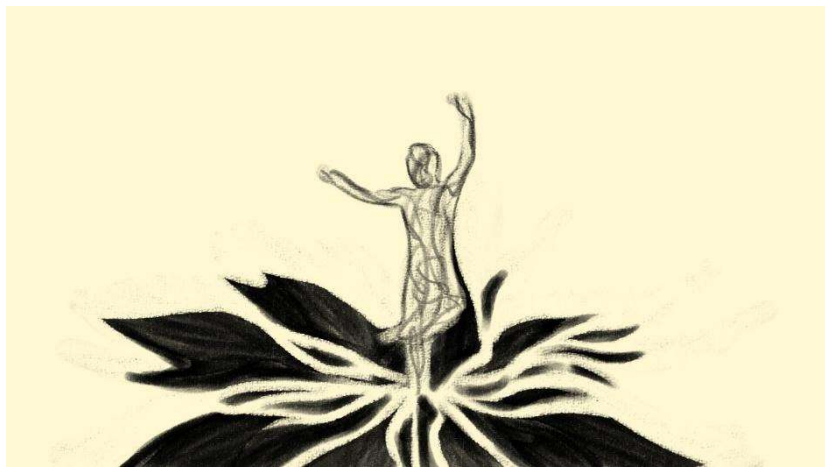
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APPENDIX II: SCREENSHOTS









APPENDIX III: STORYBOARD



